

NEWS ANALYSIS 1-0593  
FRED GALVAN

APRIL 17, 1976

THE PANAMA CANAL ISSUE IN THE U.S.

ANNCR:

NEGOTIATIONS FOR A NEW PANAMA CANAL TREATY ARE A POLITICAL ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN FORMER GOVERNOR RONALD REAGAN OF CALIFORNIA IS WAGING FOR THE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION. NEWS ANALYST FRED GALVAN HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS.

VOICE:

FOR SEVERAL WEEKS NOW, RONALD REAGAN HAS CONCENTRATED HIS CRITICISM OF THE FORD ADMINISTRATION ON ITS FOREIGN POLICY. AND IN THE PAST TEN DAYS THAT ATTACK HAS TURNED TO THE ONGOING NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND PANAMA FOR A NEW CANAL TREATY. MISTER REAGAN CALLS THESE TALKS A GIVE-AWAY OF AMERICAN SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE CANAL. PRESIDENT FORD IN TEXAS THIS WEEK REFUTED THIS REAGAN ASSERTION FIRMLY--HE SAID THE UNITED STATES WOULD NEVER GIVE UP ITS RIGHTS TO THE DEFENSE AND OPERATION OF THE CANAL. AND WHITE HOUSE AND STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMEN AMPLIFIED THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT BY POINTING OUT THAT THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS ARE PRECISELY AIMED AT PROTECTING THOSE INTERESTS.

IN SO DOING, BOTH SPOKESMEN MADE THESE POINTS: THE 1903 TREATY BETWEEN PANAMA AND THE U.S., WHICH THE PROJECTED NEW TREATY WOULD REPLACE, HAD AS ITS PRIMARY OBJECTIVE THE MAINTENANCE OF THE CANAL AS AN OPEN, EFFICIENT, SAFE AND NEUTRAL WATERWAY FOR WORLD COMMERCE. THAT PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IS ALSO PURSUED IN THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS. FOR BOTH PARTIES TO THE TALKS RECOGNIZE THAT AN OPEN, SAFE, NEUTRAL AND EFFICIENT CANAL IS IN THEIR INTEREST. THUS, THE STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES SIGNED

BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND PANAMA TWO YEARS AGO AS GUIDE-LINES FOR THE TALKS EMBODIES THAT AIM. NOTHING IN THE PAST TWO YEARS HAS CHANGED THAT.

IN THE COURSE OF THE TALKS, BOTH PARTIES HAVE AGREED THAT DURING THE LIFETIME OF ANY NEW TREATY, THE UNITED STATES WILL KEEP PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE OPERATION AND DEFENSE OF THE CANAL. HOWEVER, PANAMA'S PARTICIPATION WILL GROW AT ALL LEVELS IN THE CANAL'S OPERATION AND, AT THE TREATY'S TERMINATION, IT WILL ASSUME FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT.

AS TO THE SOVEREIGNTY ISSUE RAISED BY GOVERNOR REAGAN, THE FORD ADMINISTRATION, AS HAVE ITS PREDECESSORS GOING ALL THE WAY BACK TO 1903, HAS NEVER MADE ANY CLAIM OF UNITED STATES SOVEREIGNTY. UNDER THE 1903 TREATY, PANAMA NEVER CEDED ITS TERRITORY TO THE UNITED STATES--SO IT NEVER RELINQUISHED ITS SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE CANAL OR ITS ADJACENT ZONE. WHAT PANAMA DID WAS TO GRANT THE UNITED STATES CERTAIN RIGHTS ENABLING THE UNITED STATES TO ACT AS IF SOVEREIGN IN THE CANAL AND THE ZONE. THAT CONCEPT, BY MUTUAL AGREEMENT OF THE NEGOTIATORS, HAS BEEN DROPPED, IN FAVOR OF THE NEW ONE OF A JOINT U.S.-PANAMANIAN COMMITMENT TO DEFEND AND OPERATE THE CANAL DURING THE NEW TREATY'S LIFE.

AT ANY RATE, WHILE THE FORD ADMINISTRATION REGRETS THAT THE CANAL ISSUE HAS BEEN INJECTED IN THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN BY THE REAGAN CAMP, THERE IS AN IMPORTANT ADVANTAGE IN THAT FACT. FOR IT PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO EDUCATE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND CONGRESS AS TO THE TRUE ISSUES AT STAKE IN THE DIFFICULT NEGOTIATIONS. AND THAT EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT IF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND CONGRESS ARE TO RALLY BEHIND THE NEW TREATY--IF AND WHEN IT IS SUBMITTED TO CONGRESS FOR RATIFICATION. SO THE REAGAN RHETORIC AFTER ALL HAS SERVED SO FAR A USEFUL PURPOSE.